

# Channels

The Akron Beacon Journal guide to television

Section G

August 10 - August 16, 2008



JOHN RICARD/BET

Jeff Johnson will host *The Truth With Jeff Johnson*, which premieres at 11 p.m. Friday on BET. Johnson, an activist and minister, is a Cleveland Heights native.

## Grappling for 'The Truth'

Former resident of Cleveland Heights is BET talk show host

Jeff Johnson doesn't pretend to know the truth about everything. But he thinks he can help people find it.

Hence *The Truth With Jeff Johnson*, a weekly half-hour program premiering at 11 p.m. Friday on BET. The show features Johnson - an activist, lecturer, minister and frequent presence on BET - talking about issues of the day with experts and advocates from various fields.

The show will go on the road, with plans to broadcast from the Democratic convention, and Johnson said during

a recent telephone interview that he would like to bring it to Northeast Ohio.

Born in Great Britain, Johnson lived in Cleveland Heights from the ages of 7 to 18 - he is now 35 - and graduated from Cleveland Heights High School before going to the University of Toledo. His years in Cleveland Heights shaped him, he said, especially the way the area's African-American and Jewish residents were able to get along.

"There was real diversity,

and cooperation," he said. He thinks Ohio in general represents "this incredible fusion of what America can be" - across lines of class and race. He does not ignore the problems but he sees the opportunity for solutions.

On *The Truth*, he said, "I think the goal is to put all the possibilities out there and let people decide what the truth is." There will be commentary, by Johnson and his guests, but he thinks that it will provide an array of views and ideas "from an African-American perspective."

Or perspectives. "We're not going to be some left-wing, liberal safety net," he acknowledged. "The African-American community is not



Rich HELDENFELS

monolithic."

Johnson said he hopes to have conservative J.C. Watts as a guest, and had tried to get Republican presidential candidate John McCain for the first show. (Scheduling problems prevented the McCain appearance, Johnson said.)

He hopes to get past the same-old, same-old in discussions. Asked on Aug. 1 what issues he would have covered if he had had a show that night, he mentioned Barack Obama's trip to Europe - but would have talked about things he had not seen covered elsewhere, such as how Obama's trip affected people of color in Europe.

And, while the show will in large part be focused on the

presidential campaign until November, Johnson hopes to tackle other issues.

"If I had Lil Wayne on, I wouldn't ask him about selling a million records," Johnson said.

"I would want to ask why it is that so many young people view him as his generation's Tupac."

The ideas fly from Johnson, so many that you can catch a hint of regret when he says, "we have only 30 minutes" every week.

Rich Heldenfels writes about popular culture for the Beacon Journal and in the HeldenFiles Online blog at <http://www.ohio.com>. He can be reached at 330-996-3582 and [rheldenfels@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:rheldenfels@thebeaconjournal.com).